

SPEECH OF HON. W. S. ASHE,

OF NORTH CAROLINA.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, June 25, 1855.

The House being in the Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union on the Deficiency Bill—

Mr. ASHE said:

Mr. Chairman: My purpose in rising to address the committee, is to make exclusively a political speech, and I would not expect for this purpose to consume your valuable time, if it were not for my desire to make a personal explanation. This indulgence, I conceive, will be the more readily granted me, as it is the first time during this session I have claimed the attention of the committee for an object not strictly legislative. I am, however, a member of the committee, and I am a humble, but uncompromising adherent and advocate of the creed of the Democratic State-Rights school, and that I have always believed and maintained that the preservation of the political institutions of our country depended upon the development of their full force and vigor, of the principles of this party. Under the influence of this conviction, and doubtless instigated by a truly filial love for the State, which I in part represent, I hesitated not, during the last Congress, to throw myself in opposition to what has been misnamed the compromise measures. I refer to those heterogeneous bills reported to the Senate by the compromise committee. So hostile I deemed these measures to the constitutional rights of the several States composing this Confederacy; so unjust, oppressive, and insulting, to the people of the South, that I felt it my duty to oppose them with all the force of my intellect and voice. I am proud to say that I have seen the roof of the noble Hall fall, and in its fall crush every member of that Congress, that they should have become the laws of the land.

But the will of Congress determined otherwise; and odious as they were, they have become the settled laws of the land; and in consequence of what has been a proposition to amend the Constitution, and the rights of the South, Congress passed what is known as the fugitive slave law. The practical value of this law I never very highly appreciated, but regarded it more in the light of an experiment, by the operation of which, as a valuable touchstone, we could see the Northern feelings. By the aid of the Federal Constitution, or the dictates of the higher law was to govern and control our Northern friends. This view of this law was not peculiar to me or to the South. On the contrary, highly distinguished and worthy patriots of the North considered it in the same light, and hesitated not to apply to the political monster, the hybrid of the higher-law principle, with both sword and scimitar. The monster lashed and struggled, but his struggles were rather the convulsions of death than aspirations for victory. Sir, the South owes a debt of gratitude to those great patriots. I care not under what banners they may range themselves, I will always acknowledge the obligation.

It was the force of this feeling which induced me some months since to vote for a suspension of the rules, in order to enable my worthy friend from Indiana [Mr. Fitch] to introduce his compromise resolutions, though strongly opposed by the majority of Congress passing isolated resolutions, either for the purpose of affirming or disaffirming the efficiency of general laws, yet, under the circumstances, my sense of duty would not allow me to act otherwise, although, subsequently, when resolutions on the same subject were offered by my honorable friend from Georgia, [Mr. Jackson], I voted against each; for each were devoid of any recommendation which would justify me in sustaining them. Neither of the two latter could be considered as an extension of the right hand of fellowship—as the offering of olive branch of peace and goodwill to the North. Sir, I now allow to believe that any resolution had taken place in Northern sentiments on this subject; but recent developments have satisfied me that, under the vigorous blows of the friends of the Constitution, *fugitivism* has been made to "lick the dust."

Among these developments, the action of the late Democratic National Convention in Baltimore is of itself overwhelming. Personally, I desired no addition to the platform of 1844 and 1848 to be adopted by that body. They were sufficient, I adhered to good faith, to insure protection to the rights of the South, and this is all we demanded; but our Northern friends said, "We have found the great feeling, the feeling wound around the bleeding heart of the South. It was an assurance that the doctrine of the State-Rights Republican party has regained its ascendancy. Sir, I will read to the House a few of the resolutions constituting this platform:

9. That Congress has no power under the constitution to interfere with or control the domestic institutions of the several States, and that such States are the sole and proper judges of every matter pertaining to their own affairs not prohibited by the constitution; that all efforts of the abolitionists or others made to induce Congress to interfere with questions of slavery, or take incipient steps in relation thereto, are calculated to excite the passions and dangerous consequences, and that all such efforts are an inevitable tendency to diminish the happiness of the people, and endanger the stability and permanency of the Union, and ought not to be countenanced by any friend of our political institutions.

Resolved, That the House of Representatives was intended to embrace the whole subject of slavery agitation in Congress, and, therefore, the democratic party of the Union, standing upon this national platform, will abide by and adhere to a faithful execution of the acts known as the compromise measures, settled by the last Congress, and that no member of the House of Representatives, who is not a member of the House, being designed to carry out an express provision of the constitution, cannot, with fidelity thereto, be repealed or so changed, as to destroy or impair its efficacy. Resolved, That the Democratic party will resist all attempts at renewal of the compromise measures, and that the agitation of the slavery question, under whatever shape or color the attempt may be made.

These resolutions are clear, perspicuous, and forcible. No skeptic can doubt their meaning. No State-Rights patriot can deny their truth. But, however strongly their language is expressed, they are, in essence, the most unparliamentary demand for which they were adopted by the Convention, representing as it did the Democracy of every Northern State, should disarm us of all opposition. Although not a delegate, I was present at the Convention, and occupying a most favorable position for both hearing and seeing, I feel no hesitancy in saying, that out of two hundred and eighty-seven delegates present, not five dissenting voices were heard upon their adoption. It has been asserted that many members had left the convention before these resolutions were adopted. This, to my certain knowledge, unequivocally false. The Convention was full; it was crowded fully as much as it had been at any previous time during its proceedings.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I most earnestly invite my Southern State-Rights brethren to give these additional resolutions a fair and attentive consideration. Do they not contain the whole ground? Do not the constitutional rights of the States find in them ample protection? What stronger, what more authoritative source could we ask at the hands of our Northern friends? Let us, then, draw the pall of oblivion over our past differences, and putting our shoulders to the wheel, arise up from her benighted old ship of state, and being manned with a true and loyal crew, with the best of commanders, bid her most heartily, "God speed her way!" banishing from our bosoms all uncharitable and anxiety for her future destiny.

Mr. Chairman: I would not say to my noble crew, and most excellent officers, that I would intend to put the good old ship for sailing, I should do violence to my own feelings if I did not say a few words regarding their qualifications. The crew is the American Democracy; and the ship is the American Democracy; and the low me to say that they never failed to sustain the commands in all worthy and patriotic efforts to preserve the Constitution. Prosperity may sometimes blind them to the necessity of vigilance, and uncharitable misapprehensions may make them careless and apathetic; but when the trumpet blows from his watchpost call aloud, "Breakers!" "Breakers ahead!" each and every man will be found in his proper place, ready and anxious to do his utmost in the discharge of his duty. Who are to be our commanders? General Fremont, Pierce and Colonel William R. King. Some eight

years since, I was placed, by the partiality of my friends, on the electoral ticket of Polk and Dallas. Frequently I had a scoffing question, intended more for obloquy than for information, "What was the K. Polk?" pointed at me. In the fullness of folly the same question may again be asked, and in an anticipated reply thereto, I will return: "Did not the American Democracy then inform you by their triumphant election of Mr. Polk, who he was?" And did not the great wisdom of his Administration confirm the propriety of his selection? But I will give the information during a period of service in Congress for ten years, four in this House and six in the Senate, notwithstanding his position was conspicuous, and his efforts, in support of those great Democratic measures, under the happy influence of which our country bounded in glory and grandeur, were bold, vigorous, and effective, yet such was the reserve and modesty of Gen. Pierce's character that the world knows but little of his private and social history.

Gen. Pierce was the younger son of Gen. Benjamin Pierce, a revolutionary hero, who, at a very early age volunteered as a private in the first company that was raised for the defence of Boston. In that capacity his maiden sword was first unsheathed at the battle of Bunker Hill. From that time until the conclusion of the immortal Chevalier Bayard, *Semper paratus* was always his maxim. His country first, his country last, his country forever, was the overruling and absorbing feeling of his heart. From the loins of such a father no son less worthy, less patriotic than Franklin Pierce, could have sprung. The knowledge of our independence, he inherited from public service, converting the weapons of war into the implements of husbandry. As his war services were great, his heart humane and benevolent, his patriotism warm and energetic, it is no wonder that he enjoyed in unbounded degree the affection of the people of New Hampshire. For how can a people honor themselves than by bestowing confidence upon those citizens whose lives have been an illustration of private worth and patriotic devotion? Democracies have been branded as fickle and ungrateful, but I am proud to say, that the American Democracy, in this wise, has never blurred the name of a patriot. No descendant of herenot to forget the name of the noble son of the granite State with being illiterate. A distinguished model orator of the Whig party, some twelve years since, on the eve of a presidential election, when the public mind was held in overwhelming agitation, as even as a Pierces, he declared, "in revolutionary times there were no Sabbaths." History, both public and private, informs us more correctly that in those great times which tried men's souls, the schoolmaster dared not go abroad. His scholars were warriors, his discipline was succeeded by drums and fire. Then it is not surprising that he should have been illiterate. But, however this may be, yet one fact is certain, he was possessed, in an eminent degree, of that strong old-fashioned common sense, which enabled him to construe the Constitution of our country in a republican manner. He was also known as a warm and zealous advocate of the State-Rights party, and his explanation of this will relate an anecdote, which is given upon such high authority that its authenticity cannot be questioned. When Gen. Pierce was Governor of New Hampshire, he was engaged in writing a message to the Legislature. He got bothered in his mind how to spell a word. "Frank," he called to a servant, "bring me the dictionary." "Yes, sir," replied the servant, "but the word is spelled but 'T'." Frank spelled the word for him, emphasizing each letter very distinctly. "Be hanged to these little words," replied the war-worn soldier, "they bother me; but, Frank, when it comes to *Constitution* I can spell that without looking into a book."

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fore stood firmly by us, but Franklin Pierce was not one of them. His love of principle knew no abatement, his determination backed no vigor, his vote was uniformly in favor of their adoption. On the 9th of January, 1838, Mr. Prentiss presented petitions adopted by the Legislature of the State of Vermont, protesting against the annexation of Texas, and against the existence of slavery in the District of Columbia. These resolutions coming from a member of the Confederacy, were, as a matter of etiquette, received, but were instantly laid upon the table by a decided vote. General Pierce voting with the Southern delegation in the affirmative. This strong and constant opposition to their views of course made General Pierce the object of the animosity of the pro-slavery element in the discharge of his duties, they enlisted in their unholy crusade some of his personal friends whose application, they supposed, would claim more attention at his hands, and accordingly we find, on the 21st of February, 1838, a memorial from the citizens of New Hampshire, praying for the abolition of slavery in this District.

Mr. Pierce presented the memorial of George Gates and others, legal voters of the town of Antrim, New Hampshire, praying for the abolition of slavery in this District.

Mr. Pierce said that the memorial came to him accompanied by a letter from a highly respectable clergyman residing in his native county. The letter says, "though we are aware that your views may not correspond with those of the petitioners, they have no doubt of your readiness to present a respectful petition, coming from any portion of the citizens of New Hampshire."

It is certainly no task to present the memorial, and yet I cannot in justice to my own convictions of duty comply with the request without expressing my deep regret, that these petitioners, many of whom I am sure are actuated by pure motives, should so far from the protection of the Legislature, as to be left to the mercy of the Executive. For how can a people honor themselves than by bestowing confidence upon those citizens whose lives have been an illustration of private worth and patriotic devotion? Democracies have been branded as fickle and ungrateful, but I am proud to say, that the American Democracy, in this wise, has never blurred the name of a patriot. No descendant of herenot to forget the name of the noble son of the granite State with being illiterate. A distinguished model orator of the Whig party, some twelve years since, on the eve of a presidential election, when the public mind was held in overwhelming agitation, as even as a Pierces, he declared, "in revolutionary times there were no Sabbaths." History, both public and private, informs us more correctly that in those great times which tried men's souls, the schoolmaster dared not go abroad. His scholars were warriors, his discipline was succeeded by drums and fire. Then it is not surprising that he should have been illiterate. But, however this may be, yet one fact is certain, he was possessed, in an eminent degree, of that strong old-fashioned common sense, which enabled him to construe the Constitution of our country in a republican manner. He was also known as a warm and zealous advocate of the State-Rights party, and his explanation of this will relate an anecdote, which is given upon such high authority that its authenticity cannot be questioned. When Gen. Pierce was Governor of New Hampshire, he was engaged in writing a message to the Legislature. He got bothered in his mind how to spell a word. "Frank," he called to a servant, "bring me the dictionary." "Yes, sir," replied the servant, "but the word is spelled but 'T'." Frank spelled the word for him, emphasizing each letter very distinctly. "Be hanged to these little words," replied the war-worn soldier, "they bother me; but, Frank, when it comes to *Constitution* I can spell that without looking into a book."

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opponents have selected the case of Mrs. Harrison, as a point of attack. I will quote a part of his speech upon this occasion, which will show the unprejudiced and fair-minded, whether he was right or not. In the course of his argument, Gen. Pierce says:

"Without any feelings adverse to this claim, politically or otherwise, he protested against any legislation based upon my sympathies. He protested against the power and dominion of that 'inward arbiter,' which, in private life, was most sure to lead us right, but as public men, and disposers of the public money, was sure to lead us wrong. It made a vast difference whether we paid the money from our own pockets or drew it from the pockets of our constituents. He knew his own weakness upon this point personally, but it would be his steady purpose, in spite of taunts and unworthy imputations, to escape from it as the representative of others. This claim was not made on account of the indulgence of the family; they were in easy, if not affluent circumstances. It was not for loss of life, or limb, or property, in the military service of his country, which has been heretofore the exclusive basis of pensions, but it was for the civil services of General Harrison, this claim was set up. This would be a broad and dangerous departure from anything which has yet been done from the commencement of the Government. In this country we have, thank God, not yet reached the day, when we acknowledge, by a system of partial legislation, the distinctions of place or of rank, and if you pass this bill, for the same reasons, and under the influence of like impulses, you ought, and you are authorized to grant similar relief to the humblest widow of the humblest clerk in your civil departments, and in all probability, many of those could make an appeal a thousand times stronger to our sympathies."

Such, Mr. Chairman, were the considerations which induced Gen. Pierce to oppose this claim, and we filed for the justice of the cause. But, our records show another application from another individual, for a pension, and as I believe Gen. Pierce was on the Committee of Pensions when it was rejected, I will explain who it was made by, and for what reasons it was rejected. In the year 1836, Major General Winfield Scott applied for a pension on the basis of his military services in the United States Army by brevet. It was rejected, on the ground that the only law under which the claim could be allowed, was passed for the benefit of wounded seamen, and was passed with the view of promoting enlistments. As the committee were not aware of any personal services of his country, they were compelled to report adversely to his application. I do not know that any attempt has been made to censure General Pierce for the rejection of this claim; but in order to prevent its being done, I will state, from the time that General Scott was breveted as Major General, in 1814, to the present time, that General Pierce has been in the service of his country, and he was compelled to report adversely to his application. I do not know that any attempt has been made to censure General Pierce for the rejection of this claim; but in order to prevent its being done, I will state, from the time that General Scott was breveted as Major General, in 1814, to the present time, that General Pierce has been in the service of his country, and he was compelled to report adversely to his application. 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